

Testimony of Dr. M. Robert Cooper, MD  
Before the  
House Committee on Agriculture  
February 6, 2006

Crown Expo Center Section A  
Fayetteville, North Carolina

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My name is Bob Cooper. My wife Jean and I are Tree Farmers from Winston-Salem. I was born in North Carolina, studied medicine at Wake Forest, practiced for my entire career in the state and now serve as director of emeritus affairs at the Wake Forest School of Medicine.

But today's not about medicine or research. It's about my other passion: family forests.

I'm here as a representative of the American Forest Foundation, and the 50,000 members of its American Tree Farm System. Together we manage about 33 million acres of certified sustainable forests here in North Carolina and around the nation.

Our Tree Farm, Meadowbrook Farm, is just one of five million family-owned forests in the South.

And we're one of six hundred thousand North Carolina families who own about three-fourths of the state's forestland. We grow most of the raw material for North Carolina's second biggest industry – forest products – supporting over 300,000 jobs and generating near \$30 billion for the state's economy.

So I was pleased when Chairman Goodlatte asked me to come here today. If ever there was a time when we needed to have a serious talk about the future of family owned forests in North Carolina, in the South, and nationwide – it's now.

The fact is, family forest owners are one of the South's most vulnerable endangered species, and our forests are fast disappearing from the landscape.

Right here in North Carolina, well over a million acres of forest have been paved in the past decade. We'll lose even more in years to come. That's the equivalent of plunking down a city the size of Raleigh every ten months.

And if you look at the South overall, the picture's just as bleak. We're losing about 1.2 million acres of family forests a year – the equivalent of paving a parking lot the size of Raleigh every month!

The foundation of much that we treasure in the South – our rich and diverse forestland – is oozing away. That's bad news for all of us:

- For the vast majority of hunters and fisherman who depend on private lands for their sport.
- For our urban neighbors who depend on family-owned forests for clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, healthy watersheds and for the green space that surrounds their cities.
- For rural communities that depend on forest-based industries to generate a huge share of their income, and some of their best jobs.
- And finally, for families like ours who have been good stewards for generations and would like our children and grandchildren to have the same opportunities we did.

Please understand me. I'm not anti-growth or anti-development or anti-anything, except maybe the Seattle Seahawks. For some owners, the opportunity to earn a return on their investment in land makes a lot of sense.

However, many other family forest owners want the opportunity to consider other choices too: to keep their forests healthy, growing and working, to keep rural communities intact and local economies strong.

Every day, it gets more difficult to make this choice. This is what I call the South's "Invisible Forest Health Crisis" ... a crisis where many forest owners don't see a way to preserve their family's heritage of voluntary, private stewardship.

I've talked to numerous Tree Farmers and here's what they have to say. [Remember this is a "Dr. Bob" sample, not a Gallup Poll. But I'm confident it's a good reflection of what's on their mind.]

Economically, they feel trapped. The value of the land under our forests is making it almost impossible to justify further investments in forestry. There are a number of factors that have put us in this spot.

Markets for wood are sluggish, near non-existent for lower-value trees. Land prices and taxes are high, and getting higher as cities and towns grow closer to the woods. In many places, we're taxed on the potential value of our land, rather than the current value – an idea that might have made sense 150 years ago. It sure as heck doesn't make sense today.

It's a fact that most families don't own forests just for the money. Most say they're in it for pride and pleasure first; a profit on timber falls further down the list. But even the most conservation-minded owner needs cash. For taxes, insurance, to invest in the future of their forests.

The problem is -- more and more these days, even that cash can't be found just by working in the woods.

This backs me and the millions of other Southern landowners right into the corner.

Our timber crop is among the most valuable in the South -- supporting over 770,000 direct jobs, and about \$120 billion in total industry output. Many rural industries depend on our wood. Just as important, our city neighbors prize the "environmental goods" we produce. Our forests are the green places suburbanites want to get away to. Their water is cleaner and cheaper because of the watersheds we manage. We produce oxygen in our forests, and take up carbon dioxide. We provide the habitat for game species our neighbors can hunt, and we take care of the special places endangered species need to survive.

It seems public values and public policy toward family forest owners are based on a paradox -- that their land can sustain itself without cash flow, and that vital public goods can be produced without investment.

Can we work our way out of this paradox? I hope we can, and the 2007 Farm Bill is an excellent place to start.

First, we all win if we choose to invest more in sustaining our nation's family forests.

That investment can take many forms:

- find, through research, new markets for low value wood;
- support for outreach, education and technical assistance to owners;
- direct incentives that owners can match with their own resources to protect watersheds, water quality and wildlife;
- facilitate private markets for ecosystem services;
- and there are many others.

Let me offer a few preliminary thoughts on some ways Farm Bill programs might help.

Incentives. Cost-share funding for family forest owners has historically varied from slim to none. The Forest Land Enhancement Program has not been able to achieve its goals, and while it's slowly growing, only a fraction of EQIP funds -- less than 2 percent -- are allocated to forestry activities. Altogether, our organization estimates that perhaps \$20 to \$30 million in cost-share funding annually ends up on family forests.

The need is much, much greater. We hope Congress will recognize that as it considers the future of the Farm Bill forestry programs and conservation programs like EQIP, the Conservation Security Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and even a better version of FLEP or expanded Forest Stewardship Program.

Please don't leave with the impression that I'm asking for a welfare program for family forest owners. I'm not. We don't need it or want it. But to keep our forests growing, and our wood-based economy intact, we need some kind of return on all the investments we make, including the things you can't chip or saw: like water quality, habitat, green space.

Outreach, Education and Technical Assistance. As a physician, I learned pretty quickly that people will work hard to help themselves – if they know what to do, and if they're confident in their ability to do it. It's the same with forestry. Unfortunately, most family forest owners in the US don't know much about their forests, or understand how they can do more to keep them healthy and growing.

At the same time, all the organizations and agencies that traditionally reached out to these owners are starved for funding. The centerpiece for these efforts – our state forestry agency – struggle with continually shrinking budgets. USDA funding for forestry extension has never exceeded a few million dollars. Often, provisions for technical assistance aren't fully integrated into the largest conservation programs.

We hope the 2007 Farm Bill will re-energize existing vehicles and spur development of new and creative delivery systems for outreach, education and technical assistance. A well-funded Forest Stewardship Program will be critical, along with new approaches to knitting together the work done by the Forest Service, NRCS, Extension and the various state agencies that "connect" with family forest owners.

Which brings me to my second "hope" for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Just as important as investing more, is investing smart. Serving as a board member of the American Cancer Society, I learned pretty quickly how tempting it is to plan for next year by repeating what you did this year, simply because you did it last year.

For the sake of our nation's family forests owners, we all have to get beyond that. As a neighbor of mine once told me: If you're not catching fish in your favorite pond, you need to at least think about finding a new pond, or a new way to spend the afternoon.

We need to take a hard look at what's working, what's not – and make certain that every dollar we invest in public programs for family forests does at least a dollar's worth of work. Where it counts. In the woods. For all of us.

As Congress takes up the next Farm Bill – in an era of ever-tighter budgets – we hope you will consider ways to get the most out of what we do spend.

Planning and Priority Setting. There's a whole alphabet soup of Federal programs, all with somewhat different objectives but in many cases working toward the same end and often on the same land.

We could maximize return on our Federal investment by seeking more joint priority-setting and planning among the different Federal agencies at the national and state level – at best, assuring that all programs mutually support the highest priority objectives, or, at least, reducing the potential for duplication and overlap.

Coordination. All effective rural conservation programs are rooted in effective state leadership. In some cases, that leadership is provided locally through Federal offices – for example, NRCS state committees and local work groups or through state extension offices. At the same time, state forestry agencies have traditionally assumed a leadership role in delivering programs for landowners and as a source of technical assistance. All these folks are good people; they understand what needs to be done. We could help them do it better by seeking more coordination among programs, more sharing of information, more joint planning and program delivery.

Results. You can't know if you're winning if you don't keep score. But you'll never know why you're winning if you don't measure carefully what works or what doesn't. We hope Congress will seek ways to assess the impact of programs based on outcomes, not just number of acres or contracts. By using compatible yardsticks across a range of different programs, we'll be able to see where we're doing the best job – and where we might be doing the same job twice.

Landscapes. Our family-owned forests are fragmenting. Our problems are not. Whether it's protecting water quality or enhancing wildlife habitat, solutions often stretch across boundary markers. Programs should encourage owners with common interests to identify common challenges and seek ways to solve them together.

Taking Advantage of All Resources – Public and Private. We were excited to hear so much talk about cooperative conservation at the White House Conference in St. Louis. It's simple common sense. There are so many different organizations – public, private and non-profit – interested in forest conservation. All make a unique contribution, but if we find ways to weave their efforts together, we'll be able to do more, and do it more creatively. We'll be able to build flexibility into the total system so we aren't trapped with 20<sup>th</sup> century tools to reach 21<sup>st</sup> century landowners, and we'll be able to produce better results more efficiently.

I'm a realist. I know this is going to come down to dollars, and there aren't many of them out there. But I believe the debate over the Farm Bill shouldn't be seen as "us" versus "them." We truly are in this together, because we all share the same ultimate goal -- to keep rural America a vibrant, vital and growing part of our economy, our environment, and our national life.

M. Robert Cooper, M.D.  
Director of Emeritus Affairs  
Professor Emeritus of Internal Medicine-Hematology/Oncology  
Wake Forest University School of Medicine

Dr. Cooper, a North Carolina native, has spent forty-three years at The Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. He began his medical career here as one of the original William Neal Reynolds scholars in 1956 and completed his formal career on December 31, 2001 after thirty-four and one-half years of service to the School of Medicine in the section on Hematology/Oncology.

His medical career began after he received his undergraduate degree from North Carolina State University and served for two years in the United States Army. After medical school he received post-doctoral training at the University of Virginia for one year and then returned to the North Carolina Baptist Hospital, where he completed his training as a medical oncologist.

As one of the pioneers in developing the Comprehensive Cancer Center of Wake Forest University, his contributions included more than 350 professional publications and more than 130 scientific presentations. In addition to his clinical practice, research and teaching, he has served as Acting Director of the Comprehensive Cancer Center, Associate Director for Community Research and Education, and Interim Chief of the Section on Hematology/Oncology.

Service to the American Cancer Society for more than twenty years is among his numerous leadership roles outside the Medical Center. In recognition of his dedication to this volunteer endeavor, he was awarded the St. George Medal, the top National Division Award. The American Cancer Society also chose him to serve as Professor of Clinical Oncology at the Medical School.

Grants from the National Cancer Institute and the National Institutes of Health have enabled Dr. Cooper to provide national recognition to the Medical Center.

In 1997 he received the MAA Distinguished Faculty Service Award from the Bowman Gray School of Medicine.

He has retired from clinical practice but continues to be active in the areas of teaching, research, writing and lectures. He was appointed Emeritus Professor and maintains an office at the Emeritus House at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

A citation from Wake Forest University describes Dr. Cooper as "a venerated authority on cancer...His extraordinary leadership sets a standard of professionalism to be emulated by those who follow."

Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: M Robert Cooper MD
  2. Business Address: 409 Emeritus House, Medical Center BLVD  
Wake Forest University Medical School  
Winston-Salem NC
  3. Business Phone Number: 336-716-3473
  4. Organization you represent: American Tree Farm System - American Forest Foundation
  5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:  
Forest landowner, winner of awards and  
recognition for outstanding forestry practices  
Member of leadership of American Tree Farm System,  
board member of various local and state
  6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:  
forestry  
organization
  7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:  
Dr Cooper is a member of  
the National Public Affairs Center  
of the American Tree Farm System,  
which includes some 50,000 forest  
owners nationwide.
- PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules\* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2004.

Name: M Robert Cooper MD  
Address: 409 Emeritus House Medical Center Blvd.  
Telephone: WINSTON SALEM NC 339-716-3473  
Organization you represent (if any): 336-716-3473

American Tree Farm System American Forest Foundation

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: NONE Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: Please see attached Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: [Signature]

\* Rule XV clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.



**Summary of 2005/2006 Federal Grants and Contracts  
As of November 23, 2005**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Comment</b>
US EPA (EETAP)	PLT: Teacher Training	\$290,000	October 2004-November 2005 (\$179,000 Nov 05-06)
NASA	PLT: Earth& Sky	\$30,000	First year of three
EPA/USFS	PLT: Earth & Sky	\$297,000	First two years of three-year program (\$99,000 for 06/07)
Bureau of Land Management	PLT: Fire education	\$250,000	September 2004-August 2005 (\$200,000 Sept. 2005-Aug. 2006)
NOAA's Bay Watershed Education & Training Program	PLT: Partnering w/VA Tech	\$3,000	Mapping Water Quality: Putting Science Back in the Classroom using Places We Live module
USFS	F2W2: General Support for forest conservation projects	\$100,000	Annual
USFWS	F2W2: Project Support through Private Stewardship Grants program	\$100,000	Approximate drawdown in 2005